

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00

SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 OMB-01 IO-11 AID-05 /068 W

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O R 311640Z JAN 76 ZFF4

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3716

AMCONSUL MADRAS NIACT IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY DACCA

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 01513

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS PINT IN

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S RULE DECLARED IN TAMILNAD

REF: NEW DELHI 16339 (1975)

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT'S RULE WAS DECLARED JAN 31 IN TAMILNAD AND THE
OPPOSITION DMK GOVERNMENT AND TAMILNAD ASSEMBLY DISMISSED. GROUNDS
WERE FAILURE TO FOLLOW CONSTITUTION IN GOVERNING THE STATE. WE
UNDERSTAND STATE GOVERNOR STRONGLY ARGUED AGAINST DECISION TAKEN BUT
WAS OVERRULED. DMK LEADERS PRIVATELY SAY THEY WILL TRY TO CONTINUE
PEACEFUL POLITICAL POLITICS INCLUDING MEETINGS, BUT DO NOT INTEND TO
PURSUE AGITATIONAL POLITICS AND FEAR ARREST AND SUPPRESSION OF THEIR
PARTY IF THEY DO. NEVERTHELESS THERE IS POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENCE AND
DISORDER IF GOI IS SEEN TO BE WORKING TO DESTROY THE DMK AND IF PARTY
LEADERS ARE JAILED. MRS GANDHI APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN CONFRONTATIONAL
COURSE RATHER THAN WAITING SEVEN MORE WEEKS UNTIL NATURAL END OF DMK
TERM BEFORE DECLARING PRESIDENT'S RULE IN ORDER TO UNDERSCORE HER
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DETERMINATION TO BROOK NO RESISTANCE TO GOI POLICIES FROM OPPOSITION-

LED STATE GOVTS. END SUMMARY

1. INDIAN PRESIDENT FAKRUDDIN ALI AHMED DECLARED PRESIDENT'S RULE IN TAMILNAD THE EVENING OF JAN 31, DISMISSING THE DMK GOVERNMENT AND DISSOLVING THE LEGISLATURE. HE ANNOUNCED HIS ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THE ADVICE OF THE GOVERNOR WHO HAD REPORTED THAT "HE WAS SATISFIED THAT A SITUATION HAD ARISEN IN THE STATE IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE COULD NO LONGER BE CARRIED ON IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION." THE DECISION WAS TAKEN AT A GOI CABINET MEETING EARLIER ON JAN 31.

2. CONGEN MADRAS REPORTED TO THE EMBASSY JAN 30 THAT SENIOR DMK POLITICIANS AND MINSITERS UNDERSTOOD THAT STATE GOVERNOR KKSHAH HAD BEEN WARNING THE PM NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE THE DMK AND HAD ARGUED STRONGLY AGAINST IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE DURING A FOUR HOUR MEETING IN DELHI LAST WEEK WITH THE PM AND HOME MINISTER. SHAH REPORTEDLY ARGUED THAT INSTEAD OF STRENGTHENING CONGRESS PARTY PROSPECTS IN THE STATE, IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE AT THIS TIME WOULD BOOMERANG AND WEAKEN CONGRESS BY GIVING THE DMK A POWERFUL NEW POLITICAL ISSUE, POLITICAL MARTYRDOM, WHICH IT WOULD BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT TO ITS ADVANTAGE.

3. DMK MINISTERS TOLD CONGEN EAVES THAT THEY PLANNED TO CONTINUE PEACEFUL POLITICAL ACTIVITY, STRENGTHENING THE PARTY ORGANIZATION, AND PREPARING FOR THE NEXT ELECTIONS SHOULD PRESIDENT'S RULE BE ESTABLISHED. THEY STRESSED THAT THEY WOULD STAY AWAY FROM AGITATION SINCE THIS COULD GET OUT OF HAND AND LEAD TO VIOLENCE. IT COULD ALSO LEAD TO THEIR BEING JAILED AND TO MORE SEVERE REPRESSIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE DMK PARTY. THEY EXPECTED THAT UNDER PRESIDENT'S RULE THE PM AND CONGRESS PARTY WOULD TRY TO WEAKEN THE DMK BY ALL MEANS, INCLUDING BRIBES, BLACKMAIL, AND PERHAPS EVEN FORMAL ACTION AGAINST SOME PARTY LEADERS ON CHARGES OF CORRUPTION AND OTHER MALFEASANCE, BUT THEY DID NOT EXPECT THE PM WOULD BAN THE PARTY, THEY THOUGHT, THEREFORE, THAT

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GIVEN THE EXTENSIVE DMK ORGANIZATION AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES THEY WOULD BE ABLE EFFECTIVELY TO EXPLOIT THE ISSUES, INCLUDING WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS FAIRLY WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITH THE EMERGENCY, AND TO STRENGTHEN THE DMK'S PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE.

4. CONGEN MADRAS BELIEVES THAT THE ABILITY OF THE DMK LEADERS TO MAINTAIN A COURSE OF MODERATION WILL DEPEND ON HOW HARD MRS GANDHI

PUSHES THE PARTY. IF A HARD LINE DESIGNED TO WEAKEN OR EVEN CRUSH THE DMK IS FOLLOWED, THE SITUATION WOULD CONTAIN CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENT REACTION FROM EXTREMIST ELEMENTS WITHIN THE DMK. TAMIL CHAUVINISM COULD BE WHIPPED UP AND A SIGNIFICANT LAW AND ORDER PROBLEM CREATED REMINISCENT OF THE ANTI-HINDI AGITATIONS OF THE MID-SIXTIES, WITH POSSIBLE REVERBERATIONS ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTH WHERE THERE ARE LARGE TAMIL POPULATIONS. SENIOR DMK SOURCES IN MADRAS ARE RELUCTANT TO PREDICT THIS COURSE OF EVENTS, BUT A VERY SENIOR INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE OFFICER TOLD CONGEN EAVES HE DID NOT RULE OUT SUCH A LINE OF DEVELOPMENTS AND THOUGHT IF IT WERE TO HAPPEN, IT WOULD LEAVE SUCH A LEGACY OF BITTERNESS THAT "THE SOUTH WOULD BE LOST FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS."

5. THE HYPOTHESES WE AND CONGEN MADRAS HAVE HEARD IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS AS TO WHY THE PM WOULD DECLARE PRESIDENT'S RULE HAVE REVOLVED AROUND REPORTS SHE HAS BEEN TOLD BY CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS AND DMK OPPONENTS IN TAMILNAD THAT THEY COULD BEAT THE DMK IN A NEW ELECTION, WITH A LITTLE HELP (SUCH AS PRESIDENT'S RULE). THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE PM IS DETERMINED TO ELIMINATE A MAJOR BODY OF ORGANIZED POLITICAL OPPOSITION WHICH THE DMK REPRESENTS, AND TO PREVENT TAMILNAD FROM BEING USED AS A BASE OF OPERATIONS FOR OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS (WE HAVE HEARD THAT GEORGE FERNANDEZ AND HIS VIOLENT ASSOCIATES HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS MOVING TO AND FRO BETWEEN TAMILNAD AND WESTERN INDIA).

6. MRS GANDHI'S DECISION TO GO AHEAD WITH A TAKEOVER OF THE TAMILNAD GOVT, DESPITE THE DMK'S CONTINUED LARGE MAJORITY IN THE STATE ASSEMBLY,

AND ON GROUNDS WHICH IN EFFECT CHARGE THE DMK WITH FAILURE TO OBEY AND
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ENFORCE THE CONSTITUTION, REPRESENTS ANOTHER SAMPLE OF THE PM'S WILLINGNESS TO MOVE DRAMATICALLY TO POLITICAL CONFRONTATION EVEN IN THE FACE OF SERIOUS POTENTIAL RISKS. HAD SHE WAITED UNTIL THE FORMAL END OF THE DMK GOVT'S TERM (MARCH 22), SHE MIGHT HAVE TAKEN THE SAME ACTION ON MORE FORMAL, AND LESS ABRASIVE TERMS. WE ARE AWARE OF NO CONDITIONS OR PROBLEMS WHICH REQUIRED THAT SHE ACT SEVEN WEEKS BEFORE THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEADLINE, OR THAT SHE DO SO IN THE HARSH CONFRONTATIONS THAT SHE HAS TAKEN. PARTICULARLY IF IT IS TRUE THAT THE STATE GOVERNOR IN FACT ARGUED STRONGLY AGAINST A TAKEOVER, THE CONCLUSION SEEMS LIKELY THAT MRS GANDHI'S OBJECTIVE INDEED IS TO SHOW SHE IS PREPARED TO CRUSH THE DMK AND OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS SHOULD THEY SHOW ANY GUMPTION (CONSEQUENTLY THE RISKS OF TROUBLE NOTED IN PARA 4 ABOVE WOULD SEEM MORE SERIOUS THAN HAD SHE WAITED UNTIL LATE MARCH TO TAKE THE PRESENT

ACTION. EMBASSY AND CONGEN MADRAS WILL WATCH DEVELOPING SITUATION IN
THE SOUTH CLOSELY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT, PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, OPPOSITION PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE01513
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760037-1117
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976012/aaaaabfb.tel
Line Count: 176
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 NEW DELHI 16339
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUN 2004 by GarlanWA>; APPROVED <30 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT'S RULE DECLARED IN TAMILNAD
TAGS: PINT, IN
To: STATE MADRAS
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006